

Statement of
U.S. Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA)
Regarding the
Australia Free Trade Agreement
July 14, 2004

“The Australia Free Trade Agreement represents trade policy gone awry. An otherwise acceptable trade agreement with an important friend and ally was hijacked by the large pharmaceutical companies and warped by the Bush Administration into a device to undermine efforts here at home to restrain skyrocketing drug costs for American seniors.

“In the name of free trade, his agreement would wall off and protect a lucrative and captive market for prescription drugs in this country from lower priced competition abroad. The drug industry and the Bush Administration know full well that there is broad support in the Congress to allow seniors to import lower-priced safe drugs from other countries, and they don’t want it to happen. So they are trying to sneak this provision into the law without an up-or-down vote in the drug language. This is nothing more than a cynical attempt to set a very dangerous precedent using the fast-track procedures here in the House to ram it through Congress without amendment.

“This provision has no business being in any free trade agreement. It damages efforts to lower costs for taxpayers and seniors alike and will be used against those of us fighting to lower drug prices here in the United States where our citizens continue to pay the highest prices in the world.

“Enough is enough. It is time to stand up to this anti-senior, anti-affordable drug trade trick and vote “no.” I will not support such efforts now or in the future if the Bush Administration intends to use such agreements, and use such allies, to thwart efforts to rein in exorbitant prescription drug costs. I cannot support a free trade agreement at such a price regardless of the affection we have for Australia and its people, and notwithstanding the other trade-related provisions which are acceptable.

“The Bush Administration had a wonderful opportunity to present to the Congress a free trade agreement with a developed country which opened markets, fostered trade, nurtured new competition, and lowered prices. Instead, the Administration engaged in subterfuge to support the Big Drug Industry at the expense of the American people.”

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